

MODULE 2. INSULARISATION. CONSTRUCTION OF SPACE, “HOT SPOTS”

Capsule 1. ‘Panopticon’ & the construction of the hotspot

Foucault found the ultimate expression of power 'from everywhere' in the example of Jeremy Bentham's 'Panopticon'. The prison's architectural design allowed a single guard, placed in the centre of a circular tower, to watch over the inmates without being seen. According to Foucault, the Panopticon makes power 'visible and unverifiable'; visible as the inmates are constantly in front of the central tower from which they are being spied on and; unverifiable as they can never know whether they are being spied on or not. As such, the incarcerated person is possessed by a constant fear of an unconfirmed and uncontrollable surveillance, an element that forms the basis of Foucault's conceptions of the new contents of governance. Specifically, the philosopher describes that inducing the fear of incessant surveillance in the incarcerated person is the main aim of the project as it asserts the automatic operation of power over himself, what Foucault called 'discipline'. Discipline - as exercised on the self, on bodies and on populations - is accompanied by the threat of punishment, segregation and incarceration for those who exhibit deviant behaviours. Foucault developed that the individual never stops passing through closed and enclosed environments of control each of which has its own rules: first the family, then the school, the

army, the factory, the hospital and the prison - the prime example of enclosed environments.

In 'Necropolitics' Achille Mbembe speaks about a world always already invaded by inequality, precarity, and militarisation in a climate of ever-increasing resurgence of racist, homophobic, nationalists, and fascists discourses. He outlines an alarming picture for Europe as a continent eaten up by the desire of 'apartheid' and always in the search of an enemy, whether external or internal. For Mbembe, this is how democracy embraces its dark side, what he terms as the 'nocturnal body', which erodes rights, values, and freedoms that were previously constituted. At a nutshell, the notion of necropolitics refers to the use of social and political power that dictates how some people may live and how some others must die.

Moreover, Agamben refers to the 'states of exception', similar to the state of emergency, which is based on the sovereign's ability to transcend the rule of law in the name of the public good. Agamben argues that the state of exception became in the course of the twentieth century the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics. The key of Agamben's thought, around which the theory of the state of exception revolves, is the indistinction, in the realm of politics, between the external and the internal, between the private life - which he calls *zoe* - and the public sphere, the one characterizing life as *bios*. This Aristotelian distinction does not hold anymore for Agamben, since the sovereign power needs to blur the lines in order to legitimize its ever-growing control over the lives of its citizens. The indistinct form of human being that is created in this process is called *homo sacer*. This figure has been reduced to what he defines as 'bare life', meaning that the sovereign has complete authority over *homo sacer*, not only as a citizen of a state, but even to the point of acting upon his/her own natural life, depriving this individual of the right to live. The locus where people are stripped to a 'bare life' is defined by Agamben as the camp, with a clear reference to

concentration camps in Nazi Germany, where Jews were denied not only political rights, but also the condition of human beings itself.

Last but not least, Loïc Wacquant has made a widely read and debated contribution to critical research on contemporary urban marginality. A central part of the theoretical framework is that residents of deprived areas internalize territorial stigmatization, which then has a range of negative effects. 'Territorial stigmatization' is recognized as a phenomenon that both expresses and normalizes the othering and the negative construction, representation, and government of certain geographical communities and places. 'Territorial stigmatization', as a form of symbolic violence commonly overlaps with class conflict and economic inequality -even if/when those fissures are not explicitly acknowledged- but it also dovetails with and reinforces the spatialization of racism, sectarianism, colonialism, and environmental hazard. Consequently, there are reasons to be concerned that the interests, ideologies and assumptions that are the very stuff of such 'stigma' may profoundly shape the ways through which communities are rendered the subjects for, in, and of community development. This, in turn, has implications for the integrity of community work as a practice that is embedded in the policy sphere and for the everyday interactions through which workers cultivate relationships with communities.

The processes and mechanisms of the construction and transformation of the 'panopticon', the 'necropolitics', the 'permanent state of exception' and the 'territorial stigmatization' are approached here regarding the processes of regulating migration.

Correspondingly, amongst the ways to regulate the movement of migrant and refugee populations are the places of concentration and detention of migrants and refugees, such as identification centres, 'first reception' centres, pre-departure detention centres and lastly the hotspots, which are located in border regions, at the limits of European territories.

Within the framework of the 'European Agenda on Migration' launched in spring 2015, the European Commission announced the elaboration of the so-called 'hotspot approach'. The Commission stated in July 2015 that the hotspots should help to channel the mixed migratory flows faster and more closely, either to the European asylum system or to a process for the return of persons classified as irregular migrants. The hotspot approach was also said to be a new, more sustainable and more even distribution for the resettlement of asylum seekers within Europe and for the implementation of a common European asylum system. At the same time in Greece, the Greek authorities have persisted with the implementation as a means to implement the EU-Turkey deal (2016), which had as an aim the decrease of migrant-refugees flows. Gradually, the five (5) hotspots on the Greek islands, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos, have acquired more characteristics far different to those initially announced in terms of their operation and human rights guarantees.

To begin with, the whole set up of the hotspots together with the technologies of surveillance used in them are highlighting their foremost aim of governing populations. The hotspot of Samos, for example, is being referred to by the inmates as 'Guantanamo'. It is surrounded by watchtowers, and entry is only possible through revolving doors and two-factor authentication. Those who want to enter have to show a chip and have their biometric data checked on a fingerprint scanner. All-round video cameras are installed throughout the camp, which react to movements on the fence and are supposed to detect 'suspicious behaviour' with the help of 'artificial intelligence'. The surveillance platform on Samos is part of the project 'National Migration Strategy 2020-2021, Protection of the Aegean Islands', in which the government sets priorities for dealing with asylum seekers. The new technologies used are similar in the other four hotspots located in the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios, Leros and Kos.

Accordingly, the Greek hotspots have been transformed into areas where human rights are being systematically breached. It is extremely problematic that these breaches continue despite the fact that a number of international organizations supervise and contribute to the hotspot operations. From the perspective of many refugees who have already been traumatized by violence, the issue of protection and security in the hotspots is of paramount importance. A report by Human Rights Watch, like many others, describes the unsatisfactory supply of accommodation, hygiene, water and food as well as the lack of privacy and insufficient compliance with reception standards, including the separate accommodation of women and men.

Moreover, despite its technocratic definition which describes it as a space for arranging, classifying and channeling 'mixed' migrant and refugee populations (EC, 2015) it is materialising a distinction between those entitled to international protection (asylum) and those to whom it is denied, thus, the hotspots are made visible through a 'naked' separation (Agamben) between life and death, survival and extinction, rights and precarity.

Adding to the above and despite the human misery inflicted by the geographical restriction, the hotspot measures do not allow refugees to travel to the mainland and make no referrals to proper accommodation according to the individuals' needs and vulnerabilities. Meanwhile, transfer to the mainland remains very slow due to the reported lack of available places in camps there.

It is also of particular importance that the way hotspots operate since the implementation of the deal has led parts of the local island communities to shift towards extreme conservative positions, xenophobia and on several occasions, racist attacks. However, for the political European elite this model is still considered successful. In one of the recent European summits, it was presented as a good practice to be implemented in the Central European countries accordingly.

Overall, we could say that, since in all hotspots in the Mediterranean, migrant and refugee 'populations' are forced -in the 'best case'- to live in a container, their locations in the Mediterranean borders could well be approached as Europe's social and political 'containers'.

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Further reading

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2016/06/21/the-state-of-exception/>
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- Territorial stigmatization in theory and practice, and its implications for community development: an introduction to the themed section,
<https://academic.oup.com/cdj/article/56/2/191/6146030>
- Against the panoptical realism: An ethnography of Hotspots in Lesbos,
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- Greece: Refugee “Hotspots” Unsafe, Unsanitary, Women, Children Fearful, Unprotected; Lack Basic Shelter, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/19/greece-refugee-hotspots-unsafe-unsanitary>
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- New Camps in Greece: Panopticon for refugees, Matthias Monroy <https://digit.site36.net/2021/09/29/new-camps-in-greece-panoptikon-for-refugees/>
- Tazzioli, M. (2021). Technologies of Expulsion: Rethinking Refugees’ Carceral Economies Beyond Surveillance. Available at: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2021/11/technologies>